

# THE NEW NORMALCY

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## Sea Power and Contingency Operations in the Twenty-First Century

*Captain Robert B. Watts, U.S. Coast Guard*

**I**n September 1994, the Caribbean nation of Haiti burst into political unrest that drove twenty-six thousand migrants out to sea on board overcrowded and unseaworthy craft in an unprecedented mass migration to the United States. Several months later, over thirty thousand Cubans followed suit, attempting to reach the mainland on literally anything that could float. On 31 August 2005, a “weapon of mass destruction” in the form of a category-five hurricane exploded in the Gulf coast city of New Orleans, killing over 1,300 citizens and forcing the evacuation of tens of thousands. Finally, on 20 April 2010, the Deepwater Horizon exploratory oil rig exploded, heralding an unprecedented environmental disaster whose final impact has yet to be determined.

What these events shared, with their catastrophic nature and international impact, was a link to the sea. Although vastly different in cause, circumstances, and scope—ranging as they did from a man-made political event to recovery

from the wrath of nature—these crises all saw a significant application of sea power in reaction and recovery operations. Given the inherent flexibility of sea power and the vast naval capability of the United States, this would seem appropriate. There is little doubt that sea power is a tremendous asset in dealing with crises, in terms both of the ability to respond rapidly and of the capacity for long-term sustainability in recovery operations on-scene. The arrival of a fleet in a contingency essentially brings a floating, self-contained city into the area—a mobile source of supply, command and

*A 1985 graduate of the Coast Guard Academy, Captain Watts has served six sea tours with the Navy and Coast Guard, most recently commanding USCGC Steadfast (WMEC 623). A qualified Surface Warfare Officer and Cutterman, he holds advanced degrees from the Naval War College, Old Dominion University, American Military University, and the Naval Postgraduate School, and he is currently a doctoral candidate at the Royal Military College of Canada (War Studies). He has written extensively on sea power in professional journals and recently served as the Coast Guard chair at the National War College.*

control, and multidimensional capability. The rapidity with which modern sea power can be deployed and its long-term sustainability make it seem tailor-made for dealing with a large-scale crisis.

Naval forces have responded to a host of contingencies worldwide throughout the long history of U.S. sea power. During the Cold War, these responses varied in type but usually relied on, or set the scene for, some direct or indirect application of combat power.<sup>1</sup> But today's crisis operations are far more complex and infinitely more diverse, presenting sea power with challenges and scenarios in which it would not have been applied in the past. This tendency has been reflected to some extent in current doctrine that seeks to expand noncombatant sea-power scenarios like humanitarian assistance and domestic response;<sup>2</sup> recent experience, however, has demonstrated that crisis-contingency events, especially in the domestic setting, extend far beyond the scope of familiar mission sets.

Today, crises have become so magnified that the problem must be considered in an entirely new light—that of the “crisis contingency,” a *number* of crises combined into an *event* of unprecedented scale and impact, the effects of which develop with unprecedented rapidity. Adapting to these events is challenging. Doctrinal exhortations aside, in practice such operations are often seen as, at best, secondary to maintaining readiness for combat. This makes difficult the task of adapting sea power from a purely war-fighting instrument to one capable of responding to the crisis contingency. The underlying reasons for this difficulty are complex; they include bureaucratic and service inertia, inapposite training,

## MASS MIGRATION

*Background.* In the summer of 1994, indigent Haitian migrants began leaving the island on a heretofore unheard-of scale. While migration from Haiti via sea had always been familiar—averaging roughly 400–800 people per month—“mass migration” had only occurred once before, and then on a much smaller scale. The cause was a combination of political unrest and (unfounded) rumors that the United States had altered its immigration policies and would grant Haitians citizenship once they arrived. Over twenty thousand Haitians sailed in small, wooden, vastly overloaded, unseaworthy sailboats; the U.S. response quickly took on the nature of a massive search and rescue operation, with the overarching goal of strategic interdiction. In the ensuing months similar political rumors sent equally large numbers of Cubans to sea.

*Sea-power forces.* The sudden mass migrations required the immediate surging of the entire Coast Guard Atlantic fleet (some twenty-two major cutters), supplemented by Coast Guard Pacific assets and ten warships from the U.S. Navy. Twenty-four thousand Haitians and thirty thousand Cubans were interdicted and rescued, in Operations ABLE MANNER and ABLE VIGIL.

*External/unique factors.* The mass migration operations were widely regarded as successful in terms of the rapidity of response, operational coordination between the services, and number of lives saved. Social media played little role: the Internet was in its infancy, and unlike other contingencies there was no “land” component. Planning for a future mass migration has attempted to use the lessons of 1994 and expand the strategy to include other government agencies and the impact of new technologies on a migration event.

and a naval culture narrowly focused on a very specific combative tradition that is becoming increasingly irrelevant in real-world operations requiring flexible response.

Given the frequency of crisis contingencies, their potential strategic impact, and the commitment of resources effective response requires, it can be argued that crisis-contingency operations represent, if not a new mission set immediately, at least a new area of operations that naval forces will adopt as a core mission in the near future. Experience has demonstrated that crisis contingencies demand an entirely new set of skills, tactics, and techniques if sea power is to be applied to them effectively. But recent lessons in how this may be accomplished have not been readily learned. Sea-power theory remains largely focused on a vision of state-vs.-state warfare that is increasingly unlikely, while calls for sea power in response to crisis contingencies have increased dramatically.<sup>3</sup> A deliberate and dedicated effort to adapt old cultural viewpoints to the new reality is needed.

#### DEFINITIONS: THE NEW CRISIS CONTINGENCY

The link between sea power and crisis is not new; sea-power advocates have long argued that one of the primary missions of naval force is to stand ready, deployed, to respond to a wide variety of crises overseas. History is rife with examples of sea power performing ably in this role since the age of sail. But “crisis” is traditionally defined as some form of conflict; in the vast majority of these cases, crisis response was almost exclusively a matter of the traditional application of military (“kinetic”) power or the threat of force against potential enemies.<sup>4</sup> Naval power is by tradition “hard” power, designed and trained for employment in combat; any “softer” elements usually revolve around intimidation (“gunboat diplomacy”) in the national interest.<sup>5</sup>

New elements challenge this model. Although naval power is still used in the traditional way, crises have changed considerably in the modern era, as have the requirements for response to them. In recent times naval power has been used increasingly in nontraditional crisis response, not only internationally but also domestically, in a wide range of disasters, evacuations, mass migrations, and homeland security events. These operations have been outside the military sphere and have differed from those within it in a number of respects. Whereas in the past, coordination with agencies other than traditional military forces was rare or nonexistent, crisis-contingency operations are inherently multiagency. Prior to the information age, crisis operations were conducted largely out of the sight and mind of anyone but members of the immediate operational forces and their military chain of command, allowing for a considerable degree of flexibility and adaptability. Today these operations are carefully scrutinized in the political and public spheres, by means of almost instantaneous communication technologies.

## KATRINA

*Background.* The “storm of the century” struck the Gulf coast on 29 August 2005. Although damage was severe along the entire coast, through three states, the most severe damage occurred when levees were breached at New Orleans, flooding the city and causing over 1,300 deaths. Although the National Response Plan was activated early in the disaster, government response as a whole received widespread criticism for delay and inefficiency.

*Sea-power forces.* As a domestic response agency, the Coast Guard ultimately deployed forty-two cutters and seventy-six aircraft prior to and immediately after the storm; it was credited with saving over thirty-one thousand lives during the evacuation. The Navy ultimately deployed nineteen ships and 346 helicopters to recovery operations. The widespread damage required a highly diverse response; offshore operations primarily focused on support to units ashore and on command and control.

*External/unique factors.* The Defense Department involvement was intensely controversial. According to the National Response Plan, disasters are primarily the response of affected states until such time as their assets are overwhelmed and federal assistance is requested. Even then, federal assistance may not take the form of military forces. During Katrina, there was inadequate understanding of how the plan was meant to work, delaying a formal request for federal assistance. Although National Guard units were on the scene quickly (largely due to the efforts of an individual commanding general), Navy forces were not committed until midweek, and even then piecemeal. Significant elements of sea power (hospital ship, combatants, and a carrier) were not assigned until well after the event and in the wake of enormous public pressure for increased federal presence. These forces ultimately contributed to the long-term recovery operation, not initial response.

The days of a military-only response where public reaction could wait for a prepared briefing are long past. These elements and others demand a new definition for these diverse operations to manage the modern crisis contingency.

What is a crisis contingency? Crises happen every day throughout the world, and they obviously cover a wide range in terms of impact and required response. Not all of them rise to the level of a crisis contingency. In the broadest sense, crisis contingencies can be defined by their size, speed, and impact. Crisis contingencies happen on a grand scale, and they happen quickly; in the current vernacular, they are “wicked” problems.<sup>6</sup> The actual incident may be anything within a broad range of possibilities, including social or political crises (such as mass migrations), a natural or man-made disaster, or an environmental event. Nonetheless, crisis contingencies share a number of elements that are significant for the employment of sea power. Scale and impact are all-important. A crisis contingency may begin as a localized event (such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, which initially was thought to be contained within a small geographic area); it has the potential to spread to theater-level proportions ultimately requiring massive response. Second, the crisis and its effects unfold and ramify with a speed that outstrips the efforts of traditional “first responders” and local emergency management agencies. Third, the crisis contingency affects some element of the national strategy or threatens national or potentially international security. Finally, the

complexity of the crisis demands response across the power spectrum, of which sea power is but one (albeit important) part.

In addition to these strategic elements, a number of other characteristics are unique, collectively, to a crisis contingency.

**Short Notice.** Modern crisis contingencies tend to afford little warning of their impact on the national psyche and the demand they will pose. These factors would seem obvious. Speed, however, has become all-encompassing with respect to not only the suddenness of the actual event but also the rapidity with which, due to the impact of modern communication methods, it is seen and magnified in the public sphere. Mass communication has made these events completely transparent and accordingly drives action into the political realm. It is an unfortunate reality that the camera often does not convey reality, and information instantaneously broadcast and interpreted on the Internet—by just about anyone—is likely to be distorted or untrue.<sup>7</sup> An event magnified in this way creates an almost instant public demand for action and, very soon after, a political demand for response. Even in cases where sea power is already poised to respond, political will can change the nature of its response or demand the use of assets not originally intended, making effective planning extremely difficult.

**Surge Requirements.** Crisis-contingency operations almost universally require immediate surges of force into affected areas. This requirement can be problematic with regard to the availability of forces and operational expertise, especially in the domestic arena.<sup>8</sup> Naval forces are deployed forces. The United States positions naval forces worldwide, poised to respond to overseas crises within a very short time, primarily with shows of force or applications of kinetic power. Crisis contingencies, however, have entirely different requirements, both operationally and materially, requiring tailored forces trained and supplied for specific types of responses that are not kinetically based. This is obviously a problem if the forces are already committed elsewhere. Even sea-power assets that traditionally focus on domestic operations (such as Coast Guard cutters) have to be redirected and assigned alternative missions, which can be very difficult to do on short notice, given established deployment cycles. The demands of normal overseas and domestic missions are such that ships in port are likely to be undergoing extensive maintenance and therefore are not readily available without significant operational degradation.<sup>9</sup>

**Intense Interagency Involvement.** As crisis contingencies are extremely diverse, responses to them are often very wide-ranging, relying on agencies focused on specific elements (food, shelter, etc.) outside the familiar military realm. This is a relatively new factor in contingency planning and response, although government agencies have always existed to deal with various aspects of crises, with

emphasis on interagency coordination common in the aftermath of 9/11.<sup>10</sup> This is not characteristic just of crisis contingencies but is evident across the entire spectrum of conflict. The U.S. approach to irregular warfare, for example, now stresses an interagency combination of “hard” and “soft” power overseas. Executive-branch departments (such as State) have found themselves engaged in operations (such as provincial reconstruction efforts) completely outside their traditional paradigms. Domestically the Department of Homeland Security stresses an “all of government” interagency approach, mandating coordination among its twenty-two subordinate agencies in both planning and execution.<sup>11</sup> While the interagency approach has the advantage of bringing specific areas of expertise to bear, it increases enormously the problem of operational coordination. This is most obvious in the civilian-military context, where the inherent differences between military and civilian-agency culture are often magnified. But even within government, federal, state, and local agencies, bureaucratic coordination problems are immense; these groups often do not speak the same administrative languages, let alone share operating procedures or equipment.<sup>12</sup>

***Flexibility and Adaptability.*** Crisis-contingency operations are complex, diverse, and subject to a rapidly changing environment. These factors demand flexibility and adaptability in both planning and response. Of course, flexibility and adaptability are inherent in sea power itself. But crisis-contingency operations exhibit a diversity that challenges mobility and versatility in a number of unique ways. Crisis contingencies are not only diverse but “new,” as elements of the post-9/11 paradigm. Planning has traditionally relied on experience, combined with due consideration of new capability, but changes have been so rapid since 9/11 that the value of “lessons learned” in the past has been greatly lessened.

## DEEPWATER HORIZON

*Background.* On 20 April 2010 the Deepwater Horizon (DWH) oil rig exploded, killing eleven workers and creating what was initially perceived as a minor oil leak. This initial assessment soon changed to a “spill of national significance,” automatically triggering federal response. Ultimately, it was estimated by CNN that 185,000,000 gallons of oil had been spilled.

*Sea-power forces/external factors.* Lessons are still being correlated and analyzed for the DWH oil spill. However, a number of strategic elements are immediately apparent. The initial surge response proved inadequate; the size of the disaster quickly required massive reinforcements of interagency personnel. The sea power employed during this event was quite different from that of previous incidents; ships offshore provided command and control but also operated with a host of local, state, and federal entities created to deal with the event, requiring heretofore unheard-of flexibility. Moreover, the politics were almost overwhelming throughout the event, as local, state, and federal levels each tried to determine appropriate spheres of control while responding to almost instantaneous social and traditional media analysis. The intense political pressure and influence on tactical operations that resulted made this operation truly representative of the new normalcy.

Although, for example, the United States has faced both mass migrations and hurricanes in the past, it was not then attuned to, and therefore did not draw, conclusions addressing the political complexities of interagency coordination or the rapidity of public communications and media; historical lessons of the kinds needed now are unavailable. Operational forces often find themselves in situations without relevant precedent (such as the effective destruction of an American city, as in Katrina). This means that effective response to these events requires corporate flexibility, adaptability, and initiative—characteristics that are not normally associated with government bureaucracies.

***Increasing Public Scrutiny.*** Perhaps no other factor is more influential in modern crisis-contingency operations than the immediate flow of information into the public sphere. This goes far beyond reporting and analysis by traditional media. Although media portrayal of operations has been a factor in modern military planning since Vietnam, the incredibly rapid rise of the Internet and of information-sharing vehicles in social media has created an entirely new paradigm that goes beyond simple transparency. Today it is possible not only to view operations in real time but also to promulgate information about them worldwide for almost immediate commentary and analysis. This ability has had enormous influence on both military and crisis-contingency operations. In Iraq, for example, the actions of a small group of soldiers at Abu Ghraib, when viewed in the global context through the amplification in the social media, directly affected national strategy.<sup>13</sup>

In hindsight, the technology that revealed what was going on at Abu Ghraib was a small taste of things to come, for the pictures used there were simple images. In 2005, live video feed sent to the social media had an enormous impact on Katrina response operations, quickly fostering the impression (rightly or wrongly) that the government was wallowing in incompetence. During the recent Deepwater Horizon oil response this effect was magnified significantly, not only through multiple manipulations of the social media but also owing to a growing use of the medium to speculate on a wide range of conspiracy theories concerning government actions, all of which had to be addressed in a frenzy of government briefings and presentations designed to maintain operational credibility.<sup>14</sup> The rapidity with which this information was generated, combined with the ability to misinterpret or propagate it for personal or political gain, constituted an entirely new distraction that had to be addressed by operational forces, so much so that significant capability was diverted for this purpose. These factors bring us to the final, and perhaps most significant, element of the modern crisis contingency.

***The Political Element.*** Clausewitz is perhaps most famous for his often-quoted view of the relationship between war and politics, a relationship that has long

been subject to fierce debate in military and academic circles. But in terms of a crisis contingency—arguably a unique form of conflict—there is no doubt of the influence of the political sphere. The instant availability of information (real or imagined) as noted above makes crisis-contingency operations intensely political at every possible level, creating a truly remarkable situation for operational forces. This is evident in two distinct areas: the creation of a political picture from “below,” and direct intervention from “above.”

Information generated from below—that is, from the Internet, social media, or individuals not involved in the response—creates immediate and direct political pressure as rumors or innuendo intensify into a “viral” event. Politically this creates the tendency to focus on events that are extremely “tactical” but very public, slowing coordinated operations to a crawl and making strategic planning and action difficult or impossible; forces deployed in the crisis can become so focused on tracking down images or rumors that they lose the “big picture” completely. This tendency is exacerbated by the ability of senior officials (both military and civilian) to communicate to all levels of the chain of command, directly and instantaneously. This effectively allows the head of an agency or a senior member of government to direct tactical operations while bypassing the established chain of command. This effect has been noted and complained of in combat arenas since the Vietnam War, but today the information technology that enables it has become vastly more powerful and pervasive. Whereas twenty (or even ten) years ago a response element would have had to answer only to its immediate superior, it is now not uncommon for field units to receive messages, questions, and tasking directly from the highest levels of their organizations or the government, directing or insisting on being kept constantly informed of the narrowest and most detailed matters.<sup>15</sup>

These core elements are present to various degrees across the full range of crisis-contingency operations, from mass migrations to natural and man-made disasters. While their extent and impact vary, all share a number of strategic commonalities: they are relatively new, present significant challenges to strategic planning and response, and potentially represent “game changing” effects. These elements must be considered when examining how sea power can contribute.

## SEA POWER IN THE CRISIS CONTINGENCY

Sea power means many things to many people. Historically in the United States, “sea power” has been viewed in the Mahanian context of large, conventional, naval forces operating far “forward” in foreign waters either to influence international events or to apply kinetic power.<sup>16</sup> This has been an evolutionary process as the United States emerged as a world power and developed a large, “blue water”

navy to ensure freedom of the seas and represent the nation's global interests. Although American sea power in this sense certainly has diverse components (Navy, Marines, Coast Guard), the general paradigm of sea power is one of large ships operating overseas in these traditional roles.<sup>17</sup>

Sea power possesses a number of characteristics that have been historically consistent, especially mobility and flexibility. The sea remains the great global common that allows for the deployment of national power relatively quickly—the movements of ships are restricted only by adverse environmental conditions or international law. Two modern elements, sustainability and comprehensive command and control, have proved very successful in naval operations during time of war. All these factors can be key to success in crisis-contingency operations as well, but adapting them to that purpose has been problematic.

Sea power in contingency operations is by necessity naval power on a fleet scale—responses to crisis contingencies by single ships or aircraft are not sufficient—but it is naval power with a difference, in that it is not for kinetic operations but rather is tailored to some extent for the demands of the specific contingency. Sea power employed in response to a mass migration, hurricane, or environmental event should be as diverse as the contingencies themselves—and it is, in theory. But theory can fall short when butting against practical and political barriers. The problem becomes apparent when examining four advantages of sea power—mobility, flexibility, sustainability, and command and control—vis-à-vis the modern crisis contingency.

### *Mobility*

The inherent mobility of sea power means largely what it does in the traditional role—modern technology allows global reach in three dimensions and almost instant operational coordination worldwide. But the primary barrier to mobility in crisis-contingency operations is not technological. If mobility is to be exercised, ships must actually sail, and it is here—in the commitment of resources to a crisis—that things become culturally problematic. Despite the need, the answer to a crisis contingency is not always to employ sea power immediately. This cultural hesitancy has two aspects.

The first is so deeply ingrained in the American psyche that it is more a matter of legend than of practical discussion. The United States has a long-standing tradition of rejecting the use of military forces in the domestic context, a rejection that dates back to the Revolution. It was codified in law with the passing of the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, which directs that military forces (specifically the U.S. Army) cannot engage in domestic law enforcement.<sup>18</sup> The legislation is often misinterpreted as meaning that *any* domestic use of military forces is illegal; that is not the case, but it is nevertheless widely believed in both civilian and military

circles.<sup>19</sup> Thus before naval forces can be committed to a crisis, a comprehensive legal review is often demanded, something that takes time—time that is usually not available.

Another cultural barrier arises from service ethos. Bluntly, warships are designed and train to fight. In the modern high-tech era, naval warfare is a very specific (and expensive) proposition. It demands very sophisticated and specialized equipment. The radar on an Aegis cruiser, for example, is exceptionally good at tracking and destroying enemy aircraft—but only that. In a crisis contingency that marginalizes that purpose of a platform's defining systems, the purpose of the platform itself could be called into question. According to this logic, if a vessel is employed (albeit successfully) for a purpose for which it is not designed, the door is opened for its increasing use for that purpose and not its proper one. In the grand scheme of things, warships used for other purposes are not training for war; in the short term this leads to a loss of readiness for combat, while in the longer term it could mean the elimination of platforms altogether in favor of others more suitable for noncombat missions. Although this seems to be a largely philosophical argument, in a shrinking budget environment it is not without a certain politically compelling logic.

The effects of these factors are not insignificant. In recent crisis contingencies (the mass migration operations of 1994 and Katrina) the arrival of naval vessels was delayed while legal and operational impact issues were addressed, in the Katrina case so long as to become a national embarrassment.<sup>20</sup> Bureaucratic reasons, not materiel, were the culprits, ultimately to the detriment of the response. Hesitancy can be fatal in an operation requiring rapid response, and culture and bureaucracy can conspire to encourage just that.

### *Operational Flexibility*

Naval forces operating in combat demonstrate a remarkable flexibility with respect to a host of missions—deep strike, amphibious operations, coordinated air campaigns, etc. Complete control of the “three dimensional” battle space in a wide range of operating environments is a well honed and established capability, one that is constantly practiced and demonstrated. But crisis contingencies do not represent any such operational environment, and that presents a major challenge to forces whose skills are finely honed for war.

Flexibility in the strategic sense is largely a matter of planning and creating a successful force mixed to deal with the specific campaign and coordinating the operations of units toward a common objective. Naval forces sailing into a battle area will be tailored to meet the mission they will carry out there (an amphibious assault, as opposed to a strike, for example), but there is little experience available in tailoring forces to meet a modern crisis contingency and its challenges. History

plays a part in this; crisis contingencies are sufficiently rare that determining what forces should be used is largely a matter of strategic speculation that is, in turn, subject to a host of political and cultural factors.

For example, because the requirements of worldwide deployment as established by the national military strategy remain in place, how to be ready for a crisis contingency while still meeting operational commitments is a conundrum demanding engagement at the highest planning levels, one that raises questions with no easy answers. Should, for example, an aircraft carrier be used as a contingency support platform vice a strike platform overseas? How should its mission capabilities be modified? What are the ramifications for overseas operations and strategy in the long term? Even when forces are identified, ships may be required to surge on very short notice, but as noted previously, defining an appropriate state of readiness in the face of extensive maintenance commitments is problematic. Even these barriers to strategic flexibility do not begin to address the complexities of specialized training for a contingency or deal with “the interagency”—which we shall consider below.

### *Sustainability*

Contingencies require interagency support in forms foreign to many traditional military operations. This presents an interesting paradox. Simply put, most agencies that are designed to deal with crisis contingencies are not military yet often require the support of operational capabilities that only the military can provide on the scale required. The needs can be fantastically diverse. Agencies working on the ground in a contingency require not just food and shelter but also the means to coordinate their actions with other agencies and to perform a vast number of administrative tasks; they often require transport and, in some cases, protection. Support requirements are sometimes not limited to government agencies; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have become significant participants in both national and international contingencies.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the support required in a crisis contingency is fundamentally different from that of sustained combat, hinging on humanitarian-style operations (rescue, rebuilding, etc.) and a myriad of factors almost unknown to military planning. Support is not just a matter of transporting and stockpiling goods; ships can certainly become floating warehouses and transports easily enough. But the reality is that modern logistics is difficult even for regular military operations, involving highly coordinated processes that maximize space availability and combat effectiveness and must be administered by extensively trained personnel. Unfamiliar support requirements and materials outside the traditional military inventory can make things extremely challenging. Without aggressive advance planning and interagency cooperation, as well as extensive training for

these types of operations, there is considerable potential for strategic failure. But again, this type of detailed planning takes time, effort, and funding, and it runs hard against the cultural barrier of dedicating warships to training for war and conducting operational deployments overseas.

### *Command and Control*

The modern battle fleet is probably the best example of technology optimized for command and control. Today a naval combatant is capable of virtually instantaneous global communication and coordination. This connectivity is mobile, extensive, reliable, and generally independent of facilities ashore that could be constrained by adverse conditions or be destroyed. All this would seem tailor-made for the crisis contingency. But there are two immediate and significant problems: interoperability with typically unknown and potentially incompatible systems, and an almost unlimited demand for information.

Despite attempts to correct the glaring deficiencies that were revealed during 9/11, interagency interoperability, especially in the communications realm, remains a persistent problem.<sup>22</sup> Incompatibility between military and civilian systems is bad enough in local contingencies; in a crisis contingency that covers potentially hundreds or thousands of miles it can become a “confusion multiplier” on the theater and national levels.

The inability of agencies and groups to communicate is a difficult problem but one that can be solved through initiative and inventiveness. The inordinate demand for information in a crisis contingency is another matter. As noted, these operations are inherently political, owing to the constant and often immediate scrutiny they receive. Katrina generated hundreds of information requests from higher authorities that had to be vetted, analyzed, and answered, rapidly and in detail; in the Deepwater Horizon operation, these numbered in the thousands.<sup>23</sup> Information management in both cases was so vast a problem that it required redirection of effort at least, and at worst threatened to shut down operations.<sup>24</sup>

The inherent communications capability of deployed sea power makes it a natural communications hub for coordination of operations ashore and the focal point for response to the demand for information from the political sphere. But without prior planning and anticipation of the volume and intensity of the communications requirements it is debatable whether any standard command-and-control node will be capable of meeting the demands of the crisis-contingency environment.

This completes a somewhat cursory overview of the challenges that the elements of the modern crisis contingency present to the traditional components of sea power. Given that these operations will likely increase in both frequency and

complexity in the future, we now turn to how sea power can adapt to meet this new challenge.

## THE WAY AHEAD

There is little doubt that the inherent operational and strategic capabilities of sea power make it valuable both in initial response to crisis contingencies and as an anchor for recovery efforts that rely on sustainability and effective command and control. Despite barriers to its employment and operational difficulties, sea power has played a significant and effective role in contingencies in the past. But the world is changing, and the way ahead will not be easy. If sea power is to adapt to the challenges of the new crisis-contingency environment, a number of steps must be taken.

*Formally recognize the challenges of the new normalcy.* Effective use of sea power in crisis-contingency operations demands a response that is both tailored and specific to the contingency. Fleet power in the area can provide value simply by being present—after all, ships can certainly adapt to meet immediate tactical needs—but real value is derived only by planning that maximizes operational and strategic effectiveness in a wide range of situations. This in turn demands recognition of crisis contingencies as a core naval mission, requiring training and preparation at the level of (or perhaps exceeding) those dedicated to preparation for combat. While this prospect has been addressed to some extent by the *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, actual commitment to these types of operations is still unclear. For the future, planning for crisis contingencies must not only become a priority but be moved to the forefront of doctrine and training.

This will not be an easy task. Overcoming cultural values alone will be an enormous hurdle, amounting to a shift of over a hundred years of blue-water, Mahanian tradition to a more fluid mind-set that stresses the value of sea power in a multitude of mission areas. But the demands of the environment illustrate the need, and the idea is not without precedent. The U.S. Army, for example, stressed the large-scale conventional-warfare model until the demands of irregular warfare in the aftermath of 9/11 clearly illustrated the need for change, a change that is ongoing today.<sup>25</sup> This was accomplished only through a service-wide recognition of the need for change, a thorough analysis of the requirements, and a solid plan for implementation. This must be emulated by the naval services if they are to operate effectively in the crisis-contingency environment.

*Procure ships that stress multi-specialization and multimission capabilities for crisis contingencies.* Despite the end of the Cold War and significant reduction of the traditional threat, the United States continues to build large combatants designed primarily for fleet engagements against a symmetrically armed opponent. Given the global commitments the United States imposes on its navy and

the service's continued commitment to conventional operations, it is unlikely that this will change significantly in the near future. One could simply assume that large, capable combatants are inherently multimission and easily adaptable to the crisis contingency, but this is not entirely valid. Larger vessels that focus on overseas warfare missions (such as aircraft carriers and cruisers) do not necessarily bring multimission capabilities; in point of fact, the training requirements for these vessels and their operational commitments often make them increasingly specialized in their warfare mission areas.<sup>26</sup> Without dedicated design efforts and subsequent training, this will be a difficult pattern to break.

But this is an area that is ripe for change. Multimission capability relevant to the crisis contingency can be obtained materially by redesign of combatants so as to dedicate systems for this purpose. The littoral combat ship, for example, attaches specialized "modules" when required for various missions (mine warfare, antisubmarine warfare, etc.). This concept could be expanded to other combatants as a way of achieving some degree of specialization in crisis-contingency operations. But hardware is only a first step. Ship personnel must be trained in these forms of operations, when their mandated warfare training requirements are already enormous. This again will require a recognition of the importance of crisis-contingency operations vis-à-vis traditional warfare missions and then reevaluation of training requirements.

*Train staffs for interagency operations.* Training ships' crews to operate in diverse environments is one thing; training fleet operators and strategic planners, another. Despite the "all of government" approach taken to contingencies since 9/11, military forces still have limited experience in operating with other agencies, especially those focused on contingency operations.<sup>27</sup> It can be argued that the situation has at least been acknowledged and some steps have been taken for improvement—the *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* calls for improved interagency cooperation—but at the "operator level" there is still very limited understanding of how nonmilitary agencies work or of what level of cooperation would be required in various crisis contingencies.

This issue must be addressed not only among practitioners of sea power but throughout the government itself. This can be accomplished in two ways. The first is through a broad program of education. Various institutions pursuing Joint Professional Military Education (such as service colleges) have taken on the challenge with regard to homeland security, but they have focused on terrorist threats rather than the broad range of possible contingencies. Until a dedicated educational program is undertaken at all levels of government to stress interagency coordination in contingencies, forces will continue to arrive on the scene with limited understanding and direction and to be forced to improvise.

Operationally, fleets are directed at sea by staffs, with expertise in appropriate warfare areas. This concept can be expanded to crisis-contingency operations and responses. The Navy and Coast Guard have experimented with this approach in specific joint operations, including coordinated counternarcotics deployments.<sup>28</sup> Trained, deployable command-and-control cadres that can instantly address the requirements of a specific crisis contingency would be highly valuable. But again, a shift in service mind-sets would be required, ensuring that individuals are not only trained in this area but are given appropriate career incentives to do so.

*Aggressively address information and knowledge management.* As noted, the instant availability of information in crisis contingencies has led to a near obsession with tactical actions at the expense of strategic operations; senior officials, service secretaries, and heads of agencies and departments can and do reach directly to the lowest levels to direct or question actions on the ground. Warfare is no longer simply an extension of politics; it is now an almost instantaneous expression of the immediate political will.

It can be argued that this new element can be mitigated to some degree during actual combat operations (which to date are not continuously exposed to social media), but not so during a crisis contingency, and the effect is both immediate and potentially catastrophic. The infusion of constant, senior direction driven by tactical snippets of political information fundamentally changes the nature of operational response—and not for the better.

It would be naive to assume that this will change in the near future. But it must be addressed, probably with a new and aggressive effort to devise a cell, or system, to streamline knowledge management up and down the chain of command. As a dedicated communications node on the scene, the fleet is a natural locus. Ships might be assigned personnel trained directly in knowledge management working in designated communications spaces, streamlining the flow of information to a focal point within the command—potentially a new command element (with staff) specifically for knowledge management. The recent lessons of Katrina and the ongoing study of the Deepwater Horizon event provide plenty of examples, which need to be analyzed with the understanding that the problem will not be confined to the past. As communications and social networks improve and proliferate even more, it will only increase. It must be dealt with if operational forces are to be effective in crisis contingencies.

Sea power represents a well established and tremendously flexible means of projecting national power. For the United States it has traditionally taken the form of forwardly deployed forces ready to respond to a crisis with kinetic power or to engage in combat. The modern crisis contingency challenges this paradigm.

The strategic impact of crisis contingencies, the rapid demand for action, and the clear capability that sea power provides are indicative of a new normalcy. If sea power is to remain a viable component in future operations, it must adapt to the reality of the crisis contingency through a comprehensive review of capabilities, missions, and barriers to implementation. The world is changing; it is time for sea power to adapt.

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#### NOTES

1. Joel Sokolsky, *Seapower in the Nuclear Age: The United States Navy and NATO, 1949–1980* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991).
2. See J. T. Conway, G. Roughead, and T. W. Allen, “A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower,” October 2007, available at [www.navy.mil/](http://www.navy.mil/); repr. *Naval War College Review* 61, no. 1 (Winter 2008), p. 15, available at [www.usnwc.edu/press/](http://www.usnwc.edu/press/).
3. The debate concerning the role of the Navy in nontraditional, or irregular, warfare is intense and ongoing. See A. M. Fritz, *The Navy Role in Confronting Irregular Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Naval Analyses, March 2011), and R. B. Watts, “The End of Sea Power,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (September 2009).
4. Geoffrey Till, *Maritime Strategy in the Nuclear Age* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1984), p. 257.
5. The term “gunboat diplomacy” is often narrowly (and negatively) defined as overt naval intimidation of various types used during the latter half of the nineteenth century by imperialistic powers. It is in fact a far more sophisticated concept and is still employed in various less threatening forms today. See James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy, 1919–1991* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1994).
6. Richard Beinecke, “Introduction: Leadership for Wicked Problems,” *Innovation Journal* 14, no. 1 (2009), available at [www.innovation.cc/](http://www.innovation.cc/).
7. Farhad Manjoo, *True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-fact Society* (New York: Wiley, 2008).
8. Michèle Flournoy and Kenneth McKenzie, Jr., “Sizing Conventional Forces: Criteria and Methodology,” in *QDR 2001: Strategy-Driven Choices for America’s Security* (Washington, D.C.: NDU QDR Working Group / National Defense Univ. Press, 2001), p. 185.
9. Following the 2010 Haitian earthquake, for example, the Coast Guard responded with twelve major cutters redirected from other missions or pulled from maintenance. Ten of them suffered operational casualties that limited use, three so severe a return to port was necessary. See Mickey McCarter, “USCG Commandant Addresses Budget Challenges in Annual Address,” *HSToday.us*, 16 February 2010.
10. See Frank L. Jones, “Securing America from Attack: The Defense Department’s Evolving Role after 9/11,” in *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues*, ed. J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr. (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, n.d.).
11. The primary Department of Homeland Security document for contingencies is its *National Response Framework* (Washington, D.C.: January 2008), available at [www.fema.gov/](http://www.fema.gov/). It mandates the use of NIMS (the National Incident Management System) for interagency coordination.
12. James Carafano, *DHS 2.0: Re-thinking the Department of Homeland Security* (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 2004).
13. See “Abuse Scandal ‘Terrible’ for U.S., Powell Concedes,” *Msnbc.com*, 17 May 2004. The Abu Ghraib outcry reached the highest levels of the U.S. government. The concept of the actions of individuals in an environment of immediate media access was first raised by Lynda Liddy, “The Strategic Corporal: Some Requirements in Training and Education,” *Australian Army Journal* 2, no. 2, pp. 138–48, available at [smallwarsjournal.com/](http://smallwarsjournal.com/).

14. Thad Allen, *National Incident Commander's Report: NC252 Deepwater Horizon* (Washington, D.C.: National Incident Command, October 2010).
15. R. Charles Epperson, *A Perspective from within Deepwater Horizon's Unified Command Post Houma*, Deepwater Horizon Study Group Working Paper 11 (Berkeley: Univ. of California, Berkeley, Center for Catastrophic Risk Management, January 2011) [hereafter Epperson, *Perspective*], available at [ccrm.berkeley.edu/](http://ccrm.berkeley.edu/).
16. Historically, the Mahanian concept of sea power through decisive battle was practically expressed in the building of fleets of battleships. This eventually morphed to the development of the carrier battle group, which today remains the mainstay of U.S. sea power. See Robert O'Connell, *Sacred Vessels* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), for origins of U.S. Mahanian sea-power philosophy, and John B. Hattendorf, *The Evolution of the U.S. Navy's Maritime Strategy, 1977–1986*, Newport Paper 19 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 2004), for the development of modern carrier strategy.
17. See Frank Uhlig, Jr., *How Navies Fight: The U.S. Navy and Its Allies* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994).
18. *Posse comitatus* is often seen in the public context as a triumph of civil libertarianism; the reality is far different. The Posse Comitatus Act of 18 June 1878 was originally passed owing to pressure from the “reconstructed” South to remove federal troops occupying the region in the aftermath of the Civil War, thus enabling the enacting of various “Jim Crow” laws to restrict minority voting. Although this act originally applied only to the Army (and in a very limited sense), it is extended by tradition to all federal armed forces. It is important to note, however, that the law does not—as is widely believed in both the military and civilian sectors—prevent domestic operations but only direct law-enforcement actions (arrest and detention) and so has (in theory) only limited application to crisis-contingency operations. See G. Felicetti, “The Posse Comitatus Act: Setting the Record Straight,” *Military Law Review* 175 (March 2003).
19. See Craig Trebilcock, “The Myth of Posse Comitatus,” *Homeland Security Journal* (October 2000).
20. This issue played out in the national media as the Katrina aftermath unfolded. Although the U.S. Coast Guard responded immediately to the crisis (and to much acclaim), it soon became apparent that the forces committed were being overwhelmed by the scale of the disaster. In the national and social media, questions began to be asked about the involvement of the Defense Department; one particularly embarrassing piece showed Navy helicopters conducting training missions in nearby Florida. Significant naval forces did not arrive on-scene until a week after the event; whether this delay was due to systemic or bureaucratic inertia is a matter of ongoing debate. See Steve Bowman, *Hurricane Katrina: DOD Disaster Response*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, September 2005).
21. The importance of the involvement of NGOs in crisis operations, both domestically and overseas, cannot be overemphasized. In recent years NGOs have often been the first on the scenes of crises, and they are often far more coordinated than government agencies in their operations. The downside, of course, is that they often operate outside the sphere of direct government control, so requirements for their support are likely to appear suddenly and without warning. Moreover, long-term NGO support expectations can be unrealistic—and persistent.
22. The *9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, [2004]), available at [www.gpoaccess.gov/](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/), provides detailed examples of this problem for one specific contingency, as well as recommendations for a way ahead. For broader operations see U.S. Government Accountability Office [hereafter GAO], *Military Operations: Actions Needed to Improve DOD's Stability Operations Approach and Enhance Interagency Planning* (Washington, D.C.: May 2007).
23. The latter assertion is based on the author's personal experience.
24. See Epperson, *Perspective*.

25. There is a wide range of literature regarding the Army's shift in emphasis to irregular warfare. See T. X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (New York: Zenith, 2006), and David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009).
26. See Watts, "End of Sea Power."
27. GAO, *Military Operations*.
28. Assertion is based on the author's personal experience. The Coast Guard and Navy experimented with this during the 1990s with the formation of "Commander Task Group 4.1," a combined afloat element for counternarcotics coordination, a concept that was later expanded with the formation of Coast Guard Squadron 42, which specialized in broader, multiservice operations. Ashore, these operations are coordinated by the established joint interagency task forces in the north and west; see "Joint Interagency Task Force," [GlobalSecurity.org](http://GlobalSecurity.org).